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The Shoe Still Fits

Ever After and the Pursuit of a Feminist Cinderella

Christy Williams

The 1998 film *Ever After: A Cinderella Story*, directed by Andy Tennant and starring Drew Barrymore, is a delightful retelling of "Cinderella" (ATU 510A) for a contemporary audience that has grown up with second-wave feminism and its arguments about the problematically sexist representation of women. Unlike other popular literary and cinematic Cinderellas, who need the help of birds (Grimms and Disney), mice (Disney), or fairies (Perrault and Disney) to accomplish chores and prove themselves worthy of respect and love, Danielle (Drew Barrymore) wins the affection and esteem of her prince (Dougray Scott) by being -smart, caring, strong, and assertive. She does not rely on the prince to save her or on others to solve her problems. What sets Danielle apart from her fictional and cinematic predecessors, as well as from the other women in the film, is her self-confidence and lack of interest in material wealth, social status, and prince hunting. However, like her predecessors, she does not completely break from tradition, and the film fails to question the patriarchal structures of the "Cinderella" story.

Some critics and reviewers have labeled *Ever After* a feminist film due to Danielle's strength in contrast to the expected passivity of heroines of popularizedfairy tales. Despite disagreements as to the merits of the film, popular

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reviewers have often labeled it "feminist," or even "postfeminist,"[1] calling attention to its "girl-positive" (Schwarzbaum 1998) and "female empowerment" (Burr 1999) qualities. While academic critics have been more resistant to calling *Ever After* a feminist film, their analyses emphasize characteristics that generally fit feminist ideology, and they praise the film for its efforts at representing a strong heroine. Elisabeth Rose Gruner claims that the film "rewrit[es] Cinderella for a feminist, perhaps even a post-feminist, future" (2003, 146). John Stephens and Robyn McCallum recognize it as "a story of female resistance within a dominating patriarchy" (2002, 206). And Cathy Lynn Preston argues that *Ever After* attempts to "redefine gender boundaries" and "respond to the last thirty years of feminist critique of gender construction" in popular fairy tales (2004, 206 and 203). These critics' careful wording situates the film firmly in feminist territory by recognizing how it attempts to represent gender without stating directly whether or not it succeeds. Their resistance to making an explicit "feminist" claim for the film—as many of their popular counterparts do—indicates a tenuous relationship between the pro-girl posturing of the film and contemporary feminism.

Resistance against calling a popular fairy tale feminist is not new to fairy tale studies. In the early 1970s, Alison Lurie and Marcia R. Lieberman began the debate about whether traditional fairy tales could be feminist. The problem Lurie outlined (1970 and 1971) was that though there were strong female heroines in the classic tales, the male-dominated publishing industry had hidden them from view.[2] Fairy tales—even the traditional ones—she argued, have strong female characters and are indeed feminist. Lieberman (1972) responded that the Disney versions created the primary image of fairy tales and their passive heroines superseded lesser-known ones who might have had some pluck. The *popular* fairy tales—the ones actually affecting mass culture—she argued, were not feminist. They reinforced limiting notions of femininity and worked to acculturate girls into passive roles under patriarchy.

1 For a sampling of reviews that describe the film as feminist, see the *New York Times* (Holden 1998) and *People* (Rozen and Gliatto 1998); for post-feminist references, see the *Los Angeles Times* (Turan 1998) and *Chicago Tribune* (Wilmington 1998).

2 Classic refers to the widely popular collections of traditional tales by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, as well as literary tales by Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde.

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As the heroine of a popular retelling of a traditional fairy tale, Danielle's 1998 appearance seems to suggest that the debate over feminist/antifeminist fairy tales has been settled. Not only is she a strong female lead who represents the ideals of girl power and liberal feminism, but she recaptures the strength of the older heroines Lurie described. Preston suggests that *Ever After* "plays off of what both folklorists and feminists have asked for: an acknowledgment that there have been many versions of 'Cinderella' and that there is a need to return, as it were, to a Cinderella figure who is a 'shrewd and practical girl persevering and winning a share of the power'" (2004, 204). Danielle, according to the impressed prince, "swims alone, climbs rocks, and rescues servants," suggesting a turn in American cinema toward a strong fairy tale heroine.

Though certainly a strong heroine, Danielle is concerned with her immediate world, and her actions belong to a personal and individually centered type of feminism. Stephens and McCallum explain that "Danielle's free-spirited behavior overturns social hierarchy, codes governing female conduct, and dress regulations" (2002, 208); however, all of these changes affect only Danielle. In their discussion of agency in the film, these same critics note the inadequacy of Danielle's shift from a "vision of a just society . . . to the more private well-being envisaged within the schema of romantic love" (Ibid.). I agree that containing Danielle's utopian ideology within the framework of heterosexual romance is problematic; however, my criticism does not focus on the film's romantic vision of utopia but, instead, its narrow depiction of feminism.

Ever After assumes a feminist stance but offers a mass-mediated idea of feminism where individual women can be strong and achieve equality through personal actions that do not, however, challenge or change the underlying patriarchal structure of society.[3] And these heroines can still be (sexually) desirable and marriageable in doing so. The problems identified by second-wave feminism are simplified, emptied of their radical critiques of systemic gender inequality, and marketed to young women.[4] This limited perspective, which draws on girl power and liberal feminism, reinforces patriarchal authority by emphasizing individual achievements and isolating one woman, the heroine, as an exception to standard feminine behavior. To

3 Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse aptly refer to this idea as "faux feminism" in their analysis of *Enchanted* in this collection.

4 For a discussion of the marketing of *Ever After* to teenage girls, see Moira McCormick (1999).

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counter the idea of feminism *Ever After* projects, I will focus on the limited power of Danielle's action within the film's dynamic of narrative authority, her highly gendered representations, the reversal of the damsel-in-distress plot, and the regendering of the fairy godmother as male. The fragments of the "Cinderella" tale that are manipulated most consistently in *Ever After*—the phrase "once upon a time," the dress, the rescue, and the godmother—placate a late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century audience's expectations of popular feminism but fail to move the "Cinderella" story beyond the structural misogyny knit into the tale's plot.

Framing Danielle's Feminism

Ever After opens with a frame narrative where her elderly great-great granddaughter tells the Brothers Grimm about Danielle, the "real" Cinderella. This storytelling scene then shifts into the embedded tale that reclaims the Cinderella story for Danielle and a contemporary, mainly female, audience before returning to close the frame at the end of the film. In the final scene of Danielle's story, after she has wed her prince, she chides Prince Henry, "You, sir, are supposed to be charming." He replies, "And we, princess, are supposed to live happily ever after." "Says who?" she challenges, and he replies, "You know? I don't know." The two are in the center of the screen, framed by the window behind them, and they kiss. This scene has been cited for its genre-establishing (Gruner 2003, 150), transitionary (Preston 2004, 200), and metanarrative (Stephens and McCallum 2002, 204) work. It also questions the authority of fairy tale formulas. The characters recognize the pattern but not the authority that gives it power. As the scene ends and the film returns to the frame story, the audience is prompted to ask why the Grimms (or other fairy tale collectors) get to establish the authoritative version of this fairy tale. While the visual framing of the couple and the closing kiss in Danielle's story place the film into fairy tale and romance genres, the dialogue opens up questions of agency.

In positing Danielle's story as an alternative to the Grimms', the frame explores the struggle of who gets to tell stories and whose versions become most authoritative. Preston suggests that the film questions male authority: "In the case of *Ever After* the appeal to authority is multivocal. The film invokes the historical authority of male tradition (Perrault, Brothers Grimm, da Vinci), which it then contests through a performance of gendered genre. . . . By disrupting genre boundaries, she [the Grande Dame] is

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able to tell a different story, one that played to the competing authority of a popularized 1990s film" (2004, 211). Similarly Gruner argues that *Ever After* "finally privileges the story of woman over the history of men, the passion of women over the rational rulings of men" (2003, 146). Stephens and McCallum add that the frame "asserts that the story is told by a woman and therefore presents a female point of view, and that this view is reliable. As Marina Warner suggests about other female narrated folktales, it authenticates the tale's misogynistic attitudes" (2002, 203). While I agree that the film cultivates the privileging of female voice and desire and certainly questions male authority, the way *Ever After* is constructed and told undermines the girl power and liberal feminist stance it claims to make by qualifying and containing feminist action and speech within patriarchal structures and frames. The female narrator and overtures to feminism conceal, as Warner suggests, the male authority behind the female voice (1994, 208–9).

While the film seems to offer an alternative to the authority of the Grimms, Perrault, and Disney by presenting a superficially feminist heroine (who despite her displays of independence still needs a happily-ever-after with a charming prince to be satisfied) in a female-narrated story, the frame ultimately undercuts the film's representation of a strong heroine and female narrative authority. The film begins and ends with a crane shot of the carriage of the Brothers Grimm (Joerg Stadler and Andy Henderson), which has brought them to an unnamed Grande Dame (Jeanne Moreau) they address as "your majesty." The Grande Dame has sent for the Grimm brothers to "set the story straight." Their version of "Cinderella" is not correct, and due to her heritage, *she* possesses the painting, the shoe, and therefore, the true tale. However, *Ever After* negates the power of the Grande Dame's version by positioning her story against the Grimms' and limiting it since the audience knows that the Grimms did not change their text.

The Grande Dame mimics the narrative patterns of classic fairy tales in telling her story but, at the same time, grants authority to them. She begins her story with "once upon a time, there lived a young girl who loved her father very much," a phrase that immediately establishes Danielle in relationship to a patriarchal figure. The Grande Dame recognizes that her opening is an allusion to the Grimms, but her use of the phrase is ironic. As explained by Elizabeth Wanning Harries, a fairy tale opening is usually meant to distance the audience from the time and place of the tale and denote the creation of a fictional space (2001, 104). However for her claim of authenticity to work, the Grand Dame clearly requires her audience to

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recognize the historical setting of her story. This claim of truth suggests a blurring of genre identified by Preston as "legend" (2004, 201) and Stephens and McCallum as "historical narrative" (2002, 206).[5]

The legend status offers a narrative validity to the Grande Dame's version of "Cinderella" that other storytellers cannot claim. Preston argues that the shift from fairy tale to legend "provid[es] a fictionalized historical precedent" for the assertive and independent young women viewing the film, thus validating their own transgressive behavior (2004, 202). For the young female audience members who identify with Danielle's assertive behavior, the fairy tale-cum-legend, which blurs truth and fiction, authorizes their own ways of acting. Thus, by using the formula, the Grande Dame mocks the Grimms for not believing that the story can be true. However, because the formula "once upon a time" denotes a fairy tale, not legend or history, she undercuts her own assertion of truth.

In closing her story (and the film), the Grande Dame declares that "the point, gentlemen, is that they lived." As Gruner, Preston, and Stephens and McCallum have shown, the film conflates fairy tale with legend and history, thus allowing the Grande Dame's assertion "that they lived" to make an argument for the validity of her version of the tale, which seemingly trumps all other versions. However, her use of "gentlemen" reminds the film's audience that without the Grimms and their authority, there would be no situation requiring Danielle's story to be told. The setting of the Grande Dame's storytelling and her narrative patterns are reactionary and framed by male authority.

The film does not give the Grimms the possibility of revising their "Cinderella" to mirror the authentic tale provided by the Grande Dame or acknowledge its authority. They come, they listen to the nice old lady tell her story, and then they leave, taking her story with them. The brothers acknowledge other versions of the story (Perrault's glass slipper), but it is not those versions that the Grande Dame wants to correct. Though she claims higher social status, wealth, corroborating evidence, and a historical setting for her version, the power remains with the Grimms. While her narrating the story provides a context for the film, it does not alter the most authoritative version of the text. The Grimms' carriage, which begins and ends the movie, remains a closed vessel, containing Danielle and the Grande

5 See Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder's essay in this volume for a discussion of the "generic complexity" of films like *Ever After*.

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Dame's story. Though the film offers an alternative version of "Cinderella" more amenable to contemporary audiences and points to problems with the Grimms' story, the narrative and visual framing implicitly validates the authority of their version, thus undermining the feminist ideology of the entire film.

Danielle's Masque

In the establishing scenes of her happy childhood, a young Danielle (Anna Maguire) is portrayed as a typical tomboy who nevertheless attempts and fails to act like a girl in her stepfamily's presence. In the first scene of the embedded tale, an exchange between the eight-year-old Danielle and her male, peasant playmate Gustave (Ricki Cuttell) establishes the underlying problem. When he sees his tomboy friend clean and in a dress, Gustave exclaims, "You look like a girl!" Danielle replies, "That's what I am, half-wit." Danielle's problem is that she is a girl who does not act or look like a girl.

Judith Butler argues that gender is performative. Rather than expressing an essential quality, it is constructed by the repetition of bodily "acts and gestures" "within established political contexts" ([1990] 1999, 173, 189). Repeated behaviors are assigned gender labels within a regulating social structure, which Butler identifies as "reproductive heterosexuality" (Ibid., 173). Danielle is not shown on camera deciding to be a boy or a girl and then acting accordingly. Instead, she responds to other characters and situations and assumes a male or female approach to solve problems. Though it seems her own choice would be a potentially androgynous tomboy way of acting, her behavior is gendered by the characters in the film and the viewing audience. Danielle is identified as female by the romance plot that ultimately results in her marriage to a male, but her behavior in the film is a mix of gendered responses ranging from hyperfeminine to tomboy. Mary Ann Doane describes hyperfemininity as a masquerade that distances the female spectator from the on-screen, amplified expression of femininity, thus constituting "an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask—a decorative layer which conceals a non-identity" (2000, 426). The masquerade "flaunt[s] femininity," showing that "womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed" (Ibid., 427). Like Butler, Doane notes that "femininity is produced very precisely as a position within a network of power relations" (Ibid., 434).

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Though gender performance is not as simple as changing clothes, Danielle's feminine and masculine behavior is often signaled by her change in wardrobe (from her blue and white servant ensemble to a variety of fancier dresses). Danielle's masquerade—her donning of the costume, mannerisms, and behavior of a lady—contrasts with her masculine behavior. Judith Halberstam describes socially accepted forms of female masculinity, such as those Danielle demonstrates: "Tomboyism tends to be associated with a 'natural' desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys. Very often it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyism may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of girl identity" (1998, 6). Though the characters in the film tolerate Danielle's masculine behavior, and the audience applauds it, her heterofemininity is never truly at risk. The balance of female masculinity with feminine masquerade ensures that though Danielle may act like a boy, she is still recognizable as a girl. Halberstam argues that female masculinity becomes less transgressive when coupled with easily identifiable heterosexual behavior. Thus, Danielle's masculine behavior as an adult is rendered unthreatening because she is playing a part in a heterosexual romance, and her masculine behavior as a child is naturalized as a phase to outgrow.

Danielle is quickly identified as a tomboy in this first scene of her story. Later, when she is dressed in nice, clean clothes to meet her new stepfamily and Gustave recognizes her as a girl, Danielle responds, "Boy or girl, I can still whip you." The two children engage in an off-screen mud fight, and when approached by the now-muddy Danielle, her father (Jeroen Krabbé) says, "I had hoped to present a little lady, but I suppose you'll have to do." Because she presents herself as a tomboy, Danielle's femininity is called into question by the authority figures in the film: her father and her new stepfamily. Danielle's father recognizes that she behaves in a way more masculine than feminine and points to that disjunction as a problem. While her father hugs Danielle and laughs when speaking the chastising line, the words denote disapproval of her unladylike appearance and behavior. Danielle's gender is being negotiated, and she cannot conform to either expectation presented in this early scene. Resolving this lack of sex-gender coherence is a task that she accomplishes as the film progresses.

The term *lady* also suggests class behavior. Danielle is the daughter of a merchant landowner and becomes the stepdaughter of a baroness. The scene where she meets her new stepfamily foregrounds Danielle's gender

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as a product of social negotiation and demonstrates the way these negotiations relate to class. It establishes a pairing of gender and class mobility that Danielle continues to practice throughout the film because her occasions to assume a more intense femininity also require her to act like nobility.[6] Halberstam has noted a greater gender fluidity available to those with lower class expectations (1998, 57–58) as Danielle's adoption of more masculine masks while in servant dress demonstrates.[7]

The remainder of the film, which focuses on Danielle's adult life, reflects her ability to alternate differing degrees of feminine and masculine behavior in a way that, to contemporary audiences, still falls comfortably within her role as a female heroine. Her stepmother acts predictably as the female villain who cannot accept Danielle's new or feminist behavior. Much later in the story, Rodmilla (Anjelica Huston) blames what she calls Danielle's "masculine" behavior on her masculine features and status as an only child raised by a man. Indeed, Drew Barrymore, the actor playing the adult Danielle, while certainly pretty, is not Western-idealized, supermodel skinny. Though she is hyperfeminine (curves, long hair, soft edges), her film roles and the public discourse on her life have reinforced a childlike image that suggests a nonthreatening female sexuality (perhaps due to Barrymore's child-star status and the film's family audience). The scene where Rodmilla accuses Danielle of being masculine begins as a touching investigation of the possibility of mother-daughter bonding as Rodmilla gazes fondly on Danielle, recalling her similarities to her father. However, any possibility of a reconciliation is harshly cut short when Rodmilla reidentifies Danielle as a rival for her husband's (Danielle's father) affection and her biological daughters' future. The stepmother acts as a female agent of patriarchy, ensuring that patriarchal ideals of gender behavior and hierarchy are not solely perpetuated through male figures. It is clear from Rodmilla's comparison of Danielle to her father that masculine traits in a female body/mind are unacceptable.

As an adult—knowing that dressing above her station is a crime—Danielle masquerades as a courtier to rescue a male servant from being transported to

6 Danielle's dismissal of class differences reflects American ideology rather than the historical truth the frame implies. The American myth of a classless society, demonstrated by Danielle's ease in moving from merchant's daughter to servant to courtier to princess, is reinforced by Prince Henry's desire to open a free university, suggesting the possibility of upward mobility through education.

7 Though she is not originally from the servant class, this is the most common descriptor used about Danielle.

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the Americas. When she demands his release, her assertive behavior attracts the attention of the court, including the prince. The man with whom she is disputing responds to her forcefulness by shouting, and Prince Henry chastises him, "You dare raise your voice to a lady?" Danielle's behavior is masculine, though her dress is feminine. The man she is arguing with responds to the masculine behavior, the prince to the feminine and class-inflected dress. The film seemingly offers flexibility in defining femininity. Danielle can act out of character for a woman by communicating with men on equal terms and taking direct and aggressive action to solve problems she encounters. She is, however, the only woman in the film given this opportunity, and it is explicitly linked to a masquerade as a person of higher class. Danielle's transgressive behavior is always enabled by men, in reaction to men, or framed by men and is thereby safely contained in a clearly patriarchal structure.

Danielle's many masks represent both gender and class positions, and their identifying markers are easily assumed or dropped. Her trouble arises in choosing the correct mask for the situation. Danielle must wear the mask preferable to the powerful men whose gazes frame her life: her father in her childhood and Prince Henry in her adult life. The audience is led to identify with the prince's point of view through shots that align the camera with his perspective in several scenes (such as when Danielle climbs the rock face) so that we fall in love with her spirit, just as he does. The narrative supports this framing gaze of men. Once Danielle's story has started, the narrator breaks in after the death of her father to say, "It would be ten years before another man would enter her life." The elision of ten years not only suggests that nothing important happens but completely ignores the plethora of servants, neighbors, courtiers, and other males whom she must inevitably have encountered during that time. The only men who matter are patriarchs or potential ones. Danielle's story centers on the way two men influenced her—one raised her to be like him, the other raised her to his position in society. Though she appears to have gender fluidity, the gazes of Danielle's father and the prince are validated throughout the film so she appears to have gender coherence. The tomboy behavior is naturalized as a phase, and the hyperfemininity of masquerade is expected behavior for a princess.

Girl Power to the Rescue

More like young women of today than those of the time frame of the film, Danielle, as well as the actress who plays her, is a symbol of the girl power

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culture that began in the 1990s, most famously embodied (and marketed) by the Spice Girls. Though it had more radical roots, aspects of girl power have become a socially acceptable form of feminism, emphasizing individual strength and independence while remaining sexually attractive over working toward social or systemic change. While not calling it girl power, Jack Zipes takes issue with this representation of feminism in contemporary fairy tales, claiming that "the majority of fairy tales produced for children and adults pay lip service to feminism by showing how necessary it is for young and old women alike to become independent without challenging the structural embodiment of women in all the institutions that support the present socio-economic system" (2009, 129). In an earlier work, he argues that "the significance of the feminist fairy tales lies in their Utopian functions to criticize current shifts in psychic and social structures and to point the way toward new possibilities for individual development and social interaction" (1986, 32). Tales that "pay lip service to feminism"—often by relying on the popularity of girl power as in *Ever After*—but do not challenge systemic sexism fail to make social criticisms that mark many feminist fairy tales as potentially transformative.[8]

A common strategy in feminist fairy tale retellings is to empower a traditionally passive heroine, popularized in tales of the innocent persecuted heroine like "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty" (ATU 410), and "Snow White" (ATU 709).[9] The value systems within the tale that privilege certain behaviors—bravery, cleverness, dedication, attention to beauty—remain consistent. While certainly a feminist move that accounts for some of the girl power heroines popular in the late-twentieth century, this reversal from passivity to activity does not necessarily challenge the systemic misogyny in fairy tales, thus failing to meet Zipes's criteria for a feminist fairy tale. Donald Haase argues that "some feminist fairy tale analyses remain stuck in a mode of interpretation able to do no more than reconfirm stereotypical generalizations about the fairy tale's sexist stereotypes" (2004a, ix). I argue that his critique is also valid for fairy tale retellings like *Ever After* that remain focused solely on reversing the representation of the traditionally passive heroine. An exclusive focus on

8 Kim Snowden discusses both antifeminist postfeminism and girl power as defined in the undergraduate classroom in her consideration of literary and film versions of Angela Carter's retold fairy tales.

9 See Cristina Bacchilega (1993) and Steven Swann Jones (1993) for a discussion of the innocent persecuted heroine.

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this reversal merely reconfirms sexist stereotypical generalizations of the way fairy tale heroines are supposed to behave.[10]

The themes of rescue and role reversal are first associated with Prince Henry. He is shown escaping from his tower room down a rope of bedsheets, a scene visually reminiscent of "Rapunzel" (ATU 310). As a reversal of the princess-locked-in-a-tower motif, this is a visual cue to the viewer that it is not the prince who will be doing the rescuing in *Ever After*. In two separate scenes, Danielle subverts the damsel-in-distress trope when the prince attempts to rescue her. The first occurs when they encounter Gypsies in the forest and Danielle rescues the prince; the second happens at the film's conclusion, when she has been sold into slavery and extricates herself from danger before the prince can save her. In both cases, however, her subversion is undercut. Danielle's decisive action is transformed into a joke and explained away.

In the first scene when Danielle rescues the prince from Gypsies in the wood, she and Henry are lost. Danielle climbs to the top of a tree-covered rock to get a better sense of their location when Gypsies arrive and attack the prince. They steal her dress, which she has cleverly removed as it would have made it impossible for her to climb, and Danielle enters the fray by jumping on a Gypsy's back, fists flying. The prince barters for her release because two people are no match for a band of Gypsies. Danielle asks for her dress and a horse, and the Gypsy leader tells her she can have anything she can carry, expecting her to take the dress. Instead, she lifts the prince over her shoulders in a firefighter's hold and begins to carry him off. Plot-wise, this creates a light moment in the film where everyone can laugh at Danielle's pluck, but it also undermines her courage and resourcefulness by turning them into a joke. The humor only works if the audience and the characters in the film recognize that Danielle is acting out of character for a woman. She is bold and strong and is rewarded for those characteristics by the Gypsies with the return of her dress, the use of a horse, the freedom of the prince, and a night of revelry. In fairy tale tradition, there are many heroines who succeed by being clever and strong, so this is not an original move on the part of the filmmakers. However, in many of these tales—like "Molly Whuppie" (ATU

10 Ming-Hsun Lin describes many of the fairy tale princess/heroine stereotypes that *Ever After* engages at length in her discussion of the princess's role in this collection.

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327B) and "Kate Crackernuts" (ATU 306, 711)—the heroine's actions do not inspire laughter in every witness to her cleverness.[11]

Significantly, Danielle's feminism and strength are superfluous when it comes to being assertive with the prince about who she is. The day after the Gypsy revelry, Danielle has been beaten for her insolence at punching her stepsister (the punch is a popular example of the film's girl power). She attempts to tell the prince she is not a noble woman, but he refuses to hear her because he is too excited by his own plan to create a university. She tries to correct his misconception more than once, but he silences her, a silence she accepts as they kiss. While in terms of plotting, this is an effective way of postponing her revelation to the climax of the film, rhetorically this scene demonstrates Danielle's inability to speak when confronted by male authority; rather, she is seduced. She is only allowed to act outside of gender norms when the men in her life—the prince, her father, Gustave, and her (fairy) godfather Leonardo da Vinci—permit it.

The second scene when Danielle defies the damsel-in-distress stereotype is also disappointing. After the prince rejects her for lying about her identity, but before the requisite happily-ever-after, Rodmilla sells Danielle to Pierre Le Pieu (Richard O'Brien), a lascivious neighbor who, dressed in black, is a walking stereotype of male villainy. Despite variations in the way the two men are presented, Le Pieu and Prince Henry differ little in their attitudes: both wish to claim Danielle for their beds. At the masque, Henry intended to announce their betrothal without her consent or foreknowledge. Then, after she has been sold, Danielle is shown in shackles, and the unnamed threat of rape lingers in the exchange between her and Le Pieu. Danielle's restriction and immobility, however, are the primary danger; she is clearly denied her freedom because she is a woman and therefore can be possessed—either as a servant or wife. Danielle has no say in either case.

When told that she belongs to Le Pieu, Danielle responds, "I belong to no one." Then she skillfully takes his weapon when he least expects it. Using sword and dagger, she defends herself and threatens Le Pieu with death. He hands over the key to her shackles, and all is well. Even in this moment of triumph, when Danielle is subverting the princess-rescue-story pattern by rescuing herself, however, the whole action is qualified and framed by men. Not only are Le Pieu and Henry depicted as polarized forces, but

11 See Pauline Greenhill, Emilie Anderson-Grégoire, and Anita Best (forthcoming) for a discussion of these tales as explorations of androgyny and transgender.

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Danielle says to Le Pieu, "My father was an excellent swordsman, monsieur. He taught me well. Now hand me that key or I swear on his grave I will slit you from navel to nose." Her swordplay and courage are attributed to her father: she is not allowed to have this moment of strength herself. It is not Danielle who learned well but her father who was a good teacher. Her ability to defend herself is explained away by her father's everlasting influence, just as is her utopian philosophy of social equality.[12] When Danielle tells Prince Henry that Thomas More's *Utopia* is the lasting connection she has to her father, he exclaims, "That explains it."

Once Danielle has left the home of Le Pieu, the prince rides up to rescue her and is surprised that she has escaped so expeditiously. He recovers enough to propose to her, sliding her lost shoe on her foot in the defining "Cinderella" scene. In their exchange before the shoe is returned to its rightful owner, Danielle is struck—not by the prince's apology for his rejection of her but his use of her name. Up until this point in the film, Henry has called Danielle "Nicole," the pseudonym (her mother's name) she gave him while dressed as a courtier. A romantic might argue that in this moment, he sees her for who she truly is and loves her for being Danielle, not a courtier who reads Thomas More. However, the romance depends upon Danielle's abandonment of her earlier commitment to protect her father's land and property. She marries Henry, neglecting her previous desires to run her father's property, and goes on to be the princess and live in the castle. She leaves everything she has been fighting for when marriage is offered.

The Absence of Female Power

The only undeniable location of female power in the classic versions of "Cinderella" is the fairy godmother in Perrault's version and the dead mother's spirit in the Grimms' tale. The most potent figures in both stories are women in maternal roles who provide Cinderella with the material goods she needs to win the prince. Warner explains that both the godmother figure and the mother's spirit wield a great deal of power and influence the

12 Danielle's demonstrations of strength (the girl power and feminist moments cited by reviewers) are enacted out of her sense of morality, formed by her schooling in socialism at the foot of her father and Thomas More. She dresses above her station and lies to the prince about her identity to save a servant sold into slavery. Despite her selfless motivation, she does not take any action to better society (other than chastise the prince).

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success of the tale (1994, 48, 205). Jeana Jorgensen notes that fairy godmothers are notably absent from many traditional versions of "Cinderella," but "later literary incarnations of fairy tales often feature fairy godmothers whose appearances erase Cinderella's initial efficacy" (2007, 219, 217). In helping Cinderella, the fairy godmother displaces the heroine's independence. In *Ever After,* this character and all of the power associated with her becomes male. The role of the fairy godmother is split between two men—Leonardo da Vinci (Patrick Godfrey), who builds Danielle wings for the masque and breaks her out of her cell; and the adult Gustave (Lee Ingleby), who finds Leonardo when he is needed and creates Danielle's first makeover when she goes to court to save a servant. In both cases, men provide Danielle with what she needs to win the prince. Implicitly, then, power is denied to women, but its removal is less noticeable because these acts are performed by modern men who do not threaten heterosexual romance.[13] By reversing the gender of the godmother, this supposedly feminist version reinforces male authority and removes the main locus of female power from the story entirely.

The magic situated with the maternal figures in the classic tales is replaced by logic and science—or "forward thinking," as the prince would say—in this modernization of the "Cinderella" story. Elisabeth Rose Gruner argues that because Leonardo (and not the prince) frees Danielle from the cellar, "art, not love, is her true salvation" (2003, 149). However, it is not just Leonardo's art but also his logic and science that free Danielle. Rodmilla has locked Danielle in the cellar to prevent her from attending the royal ball, and Leonardo breaks her out by removing the door's hinges. Gruner argues that rational thought replacing magic implies that as "Cinderella's situation is realistic, her solution might be as well" (Ibid., 147). But with that realism, female power is erased. To deny female authority further, when her stepfamily forces Danielle to choose between her father's book and her mother's dress, she chooses her father. Her stepfamily, of course, denies her both of them, and the book is burned. The dress resurfaces as the one she wears to the masque, but that, too, is not just her mother's dress anymore; Leonardo has transformed it into a costume that marks Danielle's metamorphosis. Adorned by wings, her costume is symbolic of both butterfly

13 Both Leonardo and Gustave hint at a different kind of masculinity: neither is presented as a sexualized figure—one is a father figure, and the other is queered—and both are artists, a feminized career choice in present-day opinion. While powerful, they are no threat to the prince.

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and angel: the heroine is changed from the tomboy of her childhood into a virtuous woman worthy of being a princess. Leonardo's wings—not her mother's dress—make Danielle's appearance at the masque spectacular. The mother—the woman—in fairy godmother is erased, and her erstwhile power is firmly resituated in the hands of men.

The Obligatory Happily-Ever-After

The problem with *Ever After* is not that it fails as a feminist revision of "Cinderella." Rather, the popularized, restricted, and simplified version of feminism it presents masks the elements of the film that reinforce social and patriarchal structures that determine the plot and limit Danielle's possibilities as a character. The reversal of the passive-heroine trope—while certainly offering an alternative to the weak-minded Cinderellas of the past—actually naturalizes gender expectations and the idea that demonstrations of female strength are akin to gender equality. Danielle's power surfaces in reaction to and is enabled by heteropatriarchal ideology. Her independence and self-reliance become possible because of the liberal, sensitive, forward-thinking men who *allow* her to step outside of gender boundaries, not because she has fought for and won equality in society. Female power in *Ever After* is contained, undermined, and erased. The men are still in control, and despite Danielle's strength, she has no more options than the passive Cinderellas from whom she supposedly differs.

Masking its reliance on the patriarchal structure of the romance plot by dressing its heroine in the mass images of girl power, *Ever After* offers no real critique of gender oppression and creates in Danielle a Cinderella who may be more outspoken, literate, and active than her predecessors but is ultimately sucked back into the trap of heterosexual romance. She is so embedded in the naturalized complex of gender, class, political power, and upward mobility that any power she may wield as a strong feminist is restricted by the patriarchal authority demonstrated throughout the film. Danielle is ultimately limited by the stereotypical girl power and liberal feminism popular in today's media. Her feminism is thus distilled into a manner of representation: show a strong woman standing up for herself and working for equal relationships with the men in her life, and a film can be called feminist. This perspective on feminism suggests that, as a social movement, it is no longer viable because women *are* strong; the simplified standard of feminist goals has already been met. Its logical conclusion is that there used

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to be something wrong with women—they were weak and passive—but now that they are stronger, everything is okay. Such a view not only does nothing to critique social structures, but it suggests that feminism is only about women, not about gender and society.

Furthermore, the feminist idea of gender as socially constructed is restricted in *Ever After* to create the tension between Danielle's hyperfeminine masquerade and her inherent androgyny or masculinity. The multiplicity of her masks reaffirms for an audience familiar with basic concepts of feminism that girls can be physically and intellectually strong without undermining their femininity. The characters in the film may take issue with Danielle's masculinity, but today's young female audiences should embrace it. Gender stereotypes are reaffirmed, as are their association with heterosexuality. Although initially skeptical about her eventual partner, Danielle never challenges the romantic myth of heterosexuality, embracing the soulmate wedding and happily-ever-after ending when it is presented to her. As an audience, we suspect that Danielle would be fine if she did not marry the prince, but the film does not allow that possibility. In his review, Michael Wilmington states that the film "might have ended more logically and congenially if Danielle had run off to organize and care for country peasants with the good stepsister. . . . But you don't want to mess with fairy tales too much. Especially when everybody knows the ending" (1998). Danielle believes in and enacts upward mobility through the American ethic of hard work but reaffirms the notion that for women, upward mobility is still best attained by marrying a prince. Danielle, though a stronger and more independent heroine than her foresisters, has yet to outgrow the glass slipper worn by the classic, passive Cinderellas of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Walt Disney.

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